Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park
and the
Gold Discovery Park Association
Coloma, California

Oral History Project
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Alan Beilharz
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F. W. Today I [Frank Weingart] am talking to Alan Beilharz, State Park ranger at Coloma and we'll start off, Alan, if you would give us some of the background, your personal background, education and work experience, before you came to Marshall Gold Discovery Park.

A. B. Well, okay, I grew up in Santa Clara County, in the Santa Cruz Mountains actually, in the woods there, surrounded by a lot of nature. And my mother, particularly, was a student of nature and she taught me quite a bit. So that's where my interest in natural history came from, which led to my interest in state parks. As for my education, I graduated from a public high school and then went to the Jesuit University of Santa Clara. I got a four-year degree there in well, in liberal arts. My actual major was the Spanish language, but I studied a lot of history and natural sciences, philosophy, other languages and that type of thing: liberal arts education. During that time, I also was a self-employed musician. After I graduated from college in 1968, I was drafted into the armed services – Spent two years in the U. S. Army in Germany. After my discharge from the Army, I came back to California and was living up in the Santa Cruz Mountains in a kind of remote cabin and hiked across Soquel Canyon into the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park. I really didn't know it was there, but I found it, ran into a State

Park ranger there. He gave me a cup of coffee and told me about the job and I was hooked. So, that's how that happened.

F. W. What year was that roughly?

A. B. That was 1971. It might have been early '72. It was sometime during that winter of 71-72. And I then went down, probably the next day, I don't remember now, but I think it was the next day I went down to San Jose to the county offices there and I found the description of the job of State Park Ranger trainee. I got an application there and filled it out and then I waited almost a year before I was hired as a ranger trainee. Then in the meantime, of course, I had to go through the testing procedures, the written test, the oral test, the interview, the physical test and all the rest.

F. W. Were you at any of the parks before coming to Marshall Gold Discovery?

A. B. Well, I was, not many. But my first nine months was at what they called then, an intake area, which was Folsom Lake State Recreation Area. They don't have Ranger trainees anymore; they have Ranger Cadets, so it's a little different. But, in those days, they had intake areas for trainees and I was at least nominally being trained by the staff at Folsom Lake. I was there until the first of July 1973, no, yes, that's right, 1973, that's right July first. Then I went up to Grover Hot Springs State Park.

F. W. And where's Grover Hot Springs?

A. B. It's in Alpine County, about 40 miles south of Lake Tahoe. I spent four and a half years there and then on the first of February in 1978, I transferred down here.

F. W. And who was the superintendent when you reported here?

A. B. Superintendent at that time was a fellow named Gus Till. I've never known his real first name; it might've been Gus, although that sounds like a nickname to me.

F. W. Gustav?

A. B. No, sometimes August. But anyway, he was the first the superintendent here and he retired not long after I came.

F. W. And who came after him?

A. B. Next fellow was a man named Joe Reed. And he stayed quite a few years, three or four anyway, Joe Reed. Boy, let's see if I can remember this, following Joe Reed, we had, uh, I think it was during that period we had a fellow filling in, he was a Ranger II, I can't think of his name now, he was only here for a few months, and then Greg Pickard was the superintendent for about a year and he moved on, got a promotion. Matt Sugarman..

F. W. Matt Sugarman, well then, he was here till...

A. B. Matt Sugarman, he was here for many years until Ken Simmons. I couldn't give you the dates on that.

F. W. No, that's ok. I was curious of the people that you had been working with from that period of time. Do you recall any other personnel that were not superintendents at that time that went up in the Park Service, in the State Park Service, to other parks, as superintendents?

A. B. Oh. There was somebody that I forgot, I knew there was and I couldn't think who it was – Kirby Morgan was also superintendent here for a number of

years. No, none of those people moved on up, except Greg Pickard, he's the exception. I think everybody knew it at the time. He was passing through, so to speak. He was on a career path. And he came in here and he did a good job, but everybody knew he was going to take another promotion as soon as he could, and he did.

F. W. Onward and upward.

A. B. Onward and upward. But everybody else treated this more as a retirement park. You know, it was their dream come true and they were happy to just stay here. The exception to that was Kirby Morgan, who got into some kind of trouble, that I'm not sure about, exactly sure what it was, but he actually got demoted instead of promoted.

F. W. Well, it's a great facility, I can see why people would want to use this as their goal.

A. B. Yeah, Gus Till retired here: Joe Reed retired here: Matt Sugarman retired here.

F. W. Some of the residents that have been here, when you first started, were ancestors of some pretty historical people...

A. B. Descendants, you mean.

F. W. Yeah, what did I say?

A. B. Ancestors.

F. W. Descendants, yeah, their ancestors were historical figures, and specifically I know one person that you knew a little bit anyway, was Jim Monroe. Tell a little bit about the Monroe family, their, his derivation, and your recollection of Jim.

A. B. Well, I won't give you a lot on that, because most of what I know is what I have read, so whoever is researching the Monroe family could find that out more easily in the written record than off of this oral history interview. But the little that Jim Monroe told me, almost all of it I've also seen written down elsewhere, because he told other people the same thing, the same stories. All I can tell you from my personal experience is that Jim Monroe was an exceptionally nice man. He was very kind and very sweet. He was one of those people you just instantly were drawn to, his smile and his kind face and his pride and debonair attitude toward society. He liked people; it was genuine.

F. W. He was in his nineties when you knew him, wasn't he?

A. B. Yes, uh, he may been in his early eighties the first time I met him, but he was over a hundred when he died. I knew him for probably...Well, let's see, when did he die? '88, I think it was '88. So he would have been in his 90's, you're right.

F. W. Did he live in the town here?

A.B. Oh no, no, he lived in Sacramento and we very seldom saw him. I only saw maybe three times, possibly four, in all. In the early years, he would come up this time of year, right around Thanksgiving. He'd drive up from Sacramento when he was still driving. And he'd stop over there in the orchard and he'd get persimmons from the old Monroe persimmon trees and he'd take them back down. But no, he didn't live here.

F. W. Were there any other historical people, descendants of historical pioneers, that you were aware of.

A. B. Well, believe it or not, most of the ones that I knew are still living, and you might be interested in interviewing some of them before they pass on. They're all elderly now. The people that come to mind are Florence Gallagher, or is it Frances, Frances Gallagher.

F. W. They had the property right across the river, didn't they?

A. B. Last I heard she was still alive and living in a senior community in Placerville.

And then Mrs. Fancher, down here, Virginia Fancher, who is the daughter of one of the Papinnis, one of the Papinni daughters.

F. W. Does she live over by the schoolhouse?

A. B. Virginia Fancher lives at Point Pleasant, just beyond North Beach, and she has a house down there and she's elderly. She and her husband Victor still live there and their daughter, Vicky Longo, lives next door. You may know Vicky, she has some connection with the park association. The park and the Papinni house. But Virginia Fancher is the one that would know some oral history that might be useful. Also she had some photographs. Some of which I have been able to pry from her grasp, but others she has not released.

F. W. We'll follow up with her, for sure.

A. B. I did want to say just a few more words about Jim Monroe.

F. W. Oh sure, please do.

A. B. Anybody who studies the Monroe family will run across the story of the Voodoo Nugget and I saw it too. It was a great story.

F. W. Voodoo Nugget? V-O-O-D-O-O Nugget.

A. B. Yeah, he called it the Voodoo Nugget because he got voodooed every time he would show it to somebody, they would take out a penknife and scrape off a souvenir. So, he said that nugget started out as a one-ounce nugget and by the time he was done showing it to people, it only weighed less than half an ounce.

F. W. It's a good story.

A. B. He found it here. Jim was not a hard-working man the way his brother, Perly was. And Perly had several one-man gold mines here up on the ridge, what we call Monroe Ridge.

You can still see them; you can go up there and find them. They're pretty extensive, they're pretty amazing, he did a lot of work. But, this was back in the '30's in the depression and nobody had any money, so ...

F. W. Did they do very well with them?

A. B. Uh, no, I mean he maybe found enough to get by and I'm not sure now whether Jim or Perly found that Voodoo Nugget, the one I've seen. But it was taken here in the park. I imagine it was more a way to pass the time than a way to support yourself. A lot of people did that during the depression. They looked for gold, because there was nothing else.

F. W. Did he ever mention anything about his mother?

A. B. Jim, no, I don't remember...

F. W. Or the family at all. Of course, you just met him a few times, you mentioned...

A. B. Yeah, I never had the opportunity to ask him about that. I know other people have. There are oral history transcripts that I've seen. In fact we have some here and there are others on file at the county library in Placerville, both with Jim and Perly Monroe. So, I really can't add much to what's been said or written before, except just that observation that he was genial.

F. W. Interesting family, interesting family, the history of them. Uh, we've got, today; we've got different events during the year, such as Christmas in Coloma, some of the other programs. Can you recall any that were going on that have since ceased? I know we had *Art in the Park* for a few years, can you recall any others that were undertaken and then kind of went by the wayside.

A. B. Well, the only special event in the early days was the gold discovery anniversary celebration, which was called, I guess it was just called the Anniversary Celebration. And that was held on the weekend closest to January 24th. In those days, it wasn't held on the actual day. And it was held annually for decades starting I think 1948, although I'm not sure about that, of course, I wasn't here in those days. But all during the '60s and '70s there was an event held in January each year. And I came in at the very end of this story, but the story is that it got worse and worse every year. Worse in terms of rowdiness and criminal behavior and even violence. And it culminated in 1976 I believe, no, I think it was '74. See this was before my time, so I'm trying to remember what people told me, but in any event, the next to the last celebration, that's what it was called, it was called a celebration, involved street fights between E Clampus Vitus and the Hell's Angels. That's a volatile mix right there.

F. W. That's varsity...

A. B. And of course there was only a handful of park rangers here, and I don't know, weren't armed in those days, I guess they were, but they weren't trained for crowd control. They really weren't capable of handling crowds of drunken Clampers versus drunken Hells Angels.

F. W. That's big league disruption.

A. B. Yeah, they had to call in the highway patrol, and after that, the community voted almost unanimously to never hold that celebration again. So that was the end of that, except it was revived one time in 1976, which was the centennial, or the bicentennial, I mean, the United States bicentennial year and uh, all kinds of celebrations like that were *de rigueur* in that year and so we had one then, but we called in a lot of extra help, so that we wouldn't...

F. W. Put a lid on it...

A. B. Yeah, kind of keep a lid on it. I noticed because I was there. That was after I had been hired as a trainee and uh, no, I was a ranger at Grover Hot Springs and they sent me down here in 1976 to assist. That was the last one though, of those. After that, they did hold an annual celebration, an anniversary celebration, on January 24th, and that went on for something like ten years. All it was, was the County Historical Society would come out to Coloma on January 24th and watch a movie and have a couple of speeches and present a tree to the park. They would present a tree and we would go plant the tree. And then pretty much that was that.

F. W. And that was just because of the anniversary of the gold discovery.

A. B. Mmm-hmmm that's all it was. *Art in the Park* you asked about was an event that was held here for quite a number of years. It was Matt Sugarman's idea. He was an aficicionado of art and a friend of Carol Matthis and also of the potter, what's his name, Brian Hayes. So, Brian Hayes and Carol Matthis and Matt Sugarman put *Art in the Park* together and it was fairly successful. Gradually, I guess people lost interest in it and it lost its sparkle. I'm not sure why it was shut down in the end; it never was a total failure.

F. W. I lived in San Jose at the time, and uh, we came up on two or three years just for that event. It was a nice get-away from the Bay Area. I was kind of surprised when it was dropped. These things come and go.

A. B. Yeah, they come and go, exactly.

F. W. Special events, the big special events that I'm sure that stick out in your mind are the Sesquicentennial in 1998 and the World Gold Panning. Those are big planning events for panning, gold panning. What are your recollections of those two events, of the preliminary preparations, the problems, the pluses, the minuses. From a public standpoint the impressions that I got was they were outstanding. But, when you get behind the scenes and you're contemplating the problems that are going to come up, what are your recollections of those two events?

A. B. Well, the primary thing that sticks out in my mind, is the thing that came to be acknowledged, as the bottom line in the end, which is that bridge.

F. W. The what?

A. B. The bridge. When these events were first proposed, having a gold-panning contest, for example, on the other side of the bridge. Some of us, myself in particular, were very vocal about it, saying, "You've got to be crazy, you got to be kidding, we can't do that! Do you realize how narrow that bridge is?" But, they pressed on. They, in particular, involving Rosanne McHenry who was the supervising ranger. And she was of a mind and she wouldn't back down. She got her way and I guess in a way she was proven right, because the events did go off, without a great deal of trouble. But that bridge! The traffic on that bridge was horrible, it was just horrible. People would have to wait for 5, 10, sometimes 15 minutes to get across the bridge. Vehicle traffic in particular was almost at a standstill because of the vast number of pedestrians crossing the bridge. Pedestrians had to be forced to walk only on one side and walk in single file. Except, they wanted to move in both directions. So, they would actually have to have pedestrian guards at each end of the bridge and allow pedestrians only in one direction. And when they were across, bring some pedestrians across from the other direction. That way there would be room for traffic, too, vehicle traffic, which was controlled in the same fashion. So, it was a nightmare. Everything else went great; everything else went great. But, that bridge, and then I say, I was vindicated in the end because you'll notice there are no events happening on the other side of that bridge and the reason is because the local residents, particularly the ones that live on the east side of that bridge, were up in arms at the end of these events and prevailed upon the current superintendent to ...

F. W. Cease and desist.

A. B. Cease and desist having events on that side.

F. W. I remember at the events there was a person on each end with a walkie-talkie so they could communicate traffic, pedestrians, and I got stuck in some of the jams too. And I made some good friendships out of waiting 15 to 20 minutes to cross the bridge and ended up taking some people on a tour around just because we were talking just because we couldn't get across the bridge. I imagine that was a logistical nightmare for the planners on that.

A. B. Well, it was a nightmare, mostly for the residents over there. You know I had the same experience, when I had to wait for traffic to cross, you know we'd chat and everybody was smiling and laughing and having a great time and nobody really minded that much having to wait because everybody could see the bridge was only thirteen feet wide and that was a limiting factor, and there was nothing you could do about it but wait. But the people who lived over there and wanted to go to the post office to get their mail or go to a dentist appointment and they were already five minutes late. You know how that can go.

F. W. Well, I was thinking at the time, and I was standing there that the thought that had been put into it. You had a narrow bridge to work with, which was open on the sides to a degree, there was a railing, but they put fencing up so little kids couldn't fall right through the railing which would have been easy to do. I thought somebody had anticipated some problems, because the traffic was a problem.

How many countries ended up participating in the World Gold Panning? Do you remember?

A. B. Oh, I couldn't say, no I don't know the answer to that question. I remember a lot of them. I remember the Japanese team, the Spanish team, the Czech team, the Italian team, the French team, it was mostly European. In fact, most of the countries of Western Europe I think were represented. I don't remember Portugal, but Britain, France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, and then Central Europe. I remember the Czech team in particular. And then from the Asian side, there was the Japanese team. I'm sure there was others, there was an Australian team, of course. I don't remember any from South America.

F. W. I'd heard the numbers 20, 21, 22 and 23 bandied about as the total number of countries, but I don't think anybody is really keeping score, maybe somebody was, but if there was a final figure on the participation... It seemed to be a grand event.

A B. It was a grand event, it was totally grand. I had a ball, I had a blast. It was really fun for me, and for the rest of the staff, and for everybody involved in it. I'm an internationalist myself, and I try to learn about other cultures and other languages, so I had a blast. I made a lot of friends and had fun, too.

F. W. Oh, it was great, it was great. One thing, that a lot of luck was involved was on the sesquicentennial on January of 1998 in the middle or beginning part of winter. A lot of blood, sweat and tears went into that. It could have been catastrophic had the weather turned, and it could not have been a more beautiful day.

A B. It was perfect, wasn't it? Same thing happened in 1948, it was just a gorgeous day.

F. W. Yeah, that, I remember some people asking me, well why do you hold it in January, when you're fighting the weather? Well, that's because when Marshall discovered gold. You know, they'd like to push it into the summer months, but then you lose the whole point of it. Yeah there's little agate points of history there, that things could turn just on weather, but yeah but those were great. Were there any other events that stick out in your mind besides those two big ones?

A. B. Special events?

F. W. Yeah, maybe of lesser nature, but bigger problems, or bigger pluses?

A. B. Well, umh, we really didn't have any other big one-time events that I can recall; no, I don't remember any, well with the exception of the centennial memorial of Marshall's monument. That happened on May 10, 1989. Which was a hundred years to the day after the unveiling of Marshall's monument. It was May 10, 1889. That was quite a do; we had a number of speakers. It was a nice day, of course in May it usually is. Dr. Holliday came out.

F. W. The author?

A. B. Yeah, we set up a P. A. system at the monument and everybody gathered up there. We had kind a car pool, because the parking lot's pretty small. So a lot of people parked down here in town and were ferried up and many dignitaries, a couple of state assemblymen, maybe a state senator, I can't remember now. People like that. Bev Cola of course was there, and Matt Sugarman and many of the superintendents who I mentioned in the beginning of this interview, who had

worked here earlier, they came back out for that, including Kirby and some of the rangers who had worked here over the years, Ted Woodward and the others who retired since, well they came for that.

F. W. Was that held up at the monument?

A. B. It was held right next to the statue. They built a little platform there and everybody stood up on the platform.

That must of somewhat of a logistical problem too, for crowds. Maybe the crowd was not that big at the time. But, that's kind of a one-way in and out area there.

A. B. I don't remember it being a logistical problem. It wasn't that big a crowd. There were a few hundred people. Maybe not even that, maybe 250 people. And so they could all stand on that terrace there, you know.

F. W. It was a beautiful springtime of year, too. Speaking of lucking out with weather, in 1997, I believe, we had the year of the big flood

A. B. Oh yeah.

F. W. And uh, that could have, in a different year, destroyed some very significant events.

Nothing was held at that particular time, I don't believe was there, but wasn't the park itself inundated by the waters that came?

A. B. Oh the park was very heavily damaged, too. It was completely inundated from – it started on December 30. There was a flood that came up on December 30 and we thought at the time that gee, we just had another flood, but there'd been other floods like that over the past 20 years that I'd seen. You know, one in 1980, another in '86. Another year, I can't remember which year, where the water

would rise over the top of the mill monument for example. And kind of wash out the trail along the river bank there and do some damage next to the river, carry away a few signs, maybe a picnic table or two. So, we were kind of used to that. And that's what happened on the 30th and then the 31st, it came up even higher, and on the evening of the 31st, it really started to rain hard.

F. W. Was that the worst during your time here?

A. B. We knew we were in for it and then worst by far that I'd ever seen was on the morning of January 1 of 1997. I couldn't believe my eyes. You know, I'd gone to bed thinking that the worst was over.

F. W. Didn't they call that the pineapple express? The warm weather melting the snow and then rain.

A. B. Yeah, the pineapple express.

F. W. Yeah I remember that one.

A. B. So, I came down pretty much at the crack of dawn in the state truck drove down to the highway and just stared. I remember saying to myself, Oh, my God. (laughs) There was the river right next to the road.

F. W. The name Growlersburg, the people from Growlersburg – they do a lot of work in the park, repair work. I think they were involved in the repair of that flood. What is Growlersburg? What is that organization?

A. B. Well, it's a conservation camp. As I understand it the Department of Corrections has an interagency agreement with the Department of Forestry and uh, state prison inmates who are nominally under the control and direction of the

Department of Corrections are sent up to this camp which is operated by the Department of Forestry.

And they're inmates. They're treated as inmates, they're treated as prisoners, but instead of spending their time in prison, they spend their time at this camp doing work under the direction of forestry officials.

F. W. Is this mostly young people? Not necessarily teen-agers...

A. B. Tends to be mostly young people. Yeah most of the people I've seen are in their 30's maybe 40's. 20's, 30's, 40's, yeah, early middle age.

F. W. They've done some pretty good work in the park over the years.

A. B. Well they have, they have, yeah. It's uh, and I suppose they deserve some credit, but after all, they're working off a sentence, so you know, you have to look at it that way, too. I could tell you a funny story, or what I think is, not funny, but at least to me memorable so just I'll run it by you. I still, I run the Monroe trail just for my health, you know, I put on my jogging shirts and shorts and run the trail. And I was up there one day in the winter and Growlersburg was working on the ridge up there, clearing brush and stuff. And I came to a bonfire and here was a prisoner, he was throwing brush onto this fire and it was a big fire, you know flames were ten, twelve feet in the air, it was nice and hot. It was in the middle of winter, everything was wet, it was perfectly safe. And I always liked a good fire so I stopped and I said "Gee, that looks like fun." and he gave me this look, this kind of withering look and said, "Well, I'll tell you what if this was my home and that was my fireplace and that was my wife standing there instead of you, this would be fun." So, that made me stop and think, "Oh. yeah, this guy's a prisoner, I

forgot." So, my only point is that, uh they've done a lot of work, but I think that the forestry officials deserve more credit than the prisoners themselves. The prisoners are just working off a sentence and for the most part, they can be surly and uncooperative and they're only doing what they do because they're ordered to do it. And it's people like Jerry Wehrly and Ray Little before him who care about the resources and direct the work in a way that preserves public resources for future. They're the ones that deserve any credit that's due in my opinion.

F. W. Hmm, good. Over the years, the interest in the gold rush and the park itself has become more available to people and television productions are a big thing. I know one PBS production, *California Gold*, did a program on the park. You were in it as the musician. Has there been any others, TV productions, that you recall that have been done here, either domestic or foreign?

A. B. There've been a large number of them. I wish I had a better memory for such things. I couldn't really even give you a detailed list at this date. But, I can remember a crew from ABC which is Australian Broadcasting Corporation. They came here in the early 80's and they spent about a week here and they did a big production, which I never saw because it was only aired in Australia. French National Television has been here and made productions. Japanese television, AHK, it's called. They were here. These are major productions done for national networks. There've also been any number of free-lance film corporations that've come and made television productions here.

F. W. I remember, we were at the front desk there one time when a Mexican TV company came through and they were interested in, of course, the Mexican

involvement in the gold rush and I don't know what became of that. As you say when they're foreign, you never or you usually don't here about it, unless they send a letter but as far as the final product, it's kind of...

A. B. I tend to know about it more, because they usually contact the rangers. They want a ranger to go on camera and say a few words. And so I know I've been seen nation-wide in Japan, for example, and in France, and Chile – did a TV spot for them one time, for their National network. But like I say, I've never seen the films, I just been on the production end of it.

F. W. Back to your participation in the *California Gold* production, and your music capabilities, which I'm impressed with, I'll have to say. Another role that you do is the *Miner's Hat*. Describe what that is, what's involved, your skills, your musical skills, and what is the rest of that program about?

A. B. Well, it's a program of seven, I believe it's seven, different characterizations in a row. Well, six, threaded together by a seventh character who is the narrator. And uh, each character tells a different aspect of the gold discovery and the early gold rush story from his own point of view, often conflicting to some degree with the others. The characters are differentiated by wearing a different hat. The narrator turns around, takes off his narrator hat, puts on another hat and comes back around as new different character.

F. W. One-man show?

A. B. It's a one-man show, yeah.

F. W. And you're involved in music in this though, right?

A. B. No, I don't usually involve music in it. One time I did it on camera for a film version and I played a little mandolin tune half way through it, but usually I don't involve music in it at all.

F. W. How many instruments do you play?

A. B. Oh, well, if you count all of the different kind of guitars, I guess it's seven or eight. You know mandolin, cittern, fiddle a little bit, whistles, harp, guitars and different things.

F. W. At the different events, there's usually a trio: you and two others that are involved in the presentation. How often do you folks practice?

A. B. Never. No, we're all competent musicians and we've been through the material enough times that we don't feel that we need to practice. It's not complicated material. We will get together for 20 or 30 minutes before a performance and go over our harmonies if we have a piece we that have to sing in harmonies, we have to remember our parts. We'll go through those so we that don't get those mixed up. But everything else, we don't practice at all.

F. W. It flows, it flows, it's uh one of the highlights of the different events.

A. B. I will tell you this, since you asked about the *Miner's Hat.* You may interested to know that the idea for that didn't come from me it came from a friend of mine in Placerville who used to direct theatre for Theatre El Dorado. His name is Jim Orr, O-R-R, and uh, I've been in a few plays that he directed. And one of them was one called *Spoon River Anthology* which was produced at Theatre El Dorado in Placerville. And it involves something like that where there was a cast of maybe 10 actors, but between them they played 40 or 50

characters and they would change character just by putting on a different article of clothing: A shawl, a cane, a hat, a pair of glasses. No big costume changes, no makeup changes. In fact, the costumes were very bare and nondescript, so that these costume items that were being used to define the character would stand out. And the whole cast was on stage the whole time. And one character would get up and put on an article of clothing and become, I mean one actor, I said character, one actor would stand up, put on an article of clothing and become a character and recite the lines that were written by the author: Masters, what's his name, Edgar Lee Masters, I think that's his name. And that play was so successful it was taken to the Edinburgh Festival, the Fringe Festival in Scotland, in 1985, no excuse me '83. We all went over to Scotland, the whole cast, and we won the Fringe First Festival for the best play.

F. W. That's great!

A. B. There were only about 600 plays that were being produced over there. It was a wonderful play. Well, Jim had a great idea there, you know, instead of costuming and a lot of makeup and going offstage and coming back with a different character, we just stayed on the stage. And so, I thought "why not?" I had thought about it for actually two or three years before finally I put it together and I realized I could do that just by myself for the Gold Rush characters. That's how that came about.

F. W. That's marvelous!

A. B. That's how that came about.

F. W. That's one of the highlights. That's a marvelous story. Let me turn the tape over, now.

F. W. Side two. Aside from the TV productions that you've been involved with and the acting, that was a good story, I know that you've been involved to some degree with different books that have been published by different authors, probably for the most part in assistance in accuracy. One of them being *The Gold Discovery: James Marshall and the Gold Rush*, [*The Gold Discovery: James Marshall and the California Gold Rush]* with William Dillinger. I've seen some of the others too, in the museum that we sell. Are you asked very often to get involved with different authors as far as providing background information?

A. B. Yes, quite a lot, quite a lot. Well, I'm a fair writer myself too, so sometimes I don't like the assignment because I don't think the writing style or the author's skill are up to the project. I think, gosh, I could write better than this myself. And often the syntax is garbled. It doesn't say the thing clearly and well. So, it's always a little bit difficult for me to decide what to correct. If you just cross out the words that are incorrect and write in the correct words, it still doesn't make any sense. You know what I'm saying. Bill Dillinger's an exception.

F. W. Bill Dillinger? William C. Dillinger?

A. B. He was a good writer; I had little to do with that book. I did review it but he's an excellent author and an excellent researcher to boot, and so there weren't very many corrections to make.

F. W. This happens to be a quality publication that I happened to see, but I know some people are photographers, but then their captions betray their knowledge of the historical situation that they're taking a picture of.

A. B. Yeah.

F. W. And I assume quite often that you're asked, maybe not necessarily to correct their English, or their syntax, but just for historical accuracy, but I understand your conflict there. That if your name is on it, you want it to be accurate both ways.

A. B. Plus, I want it to tell, to reveal and discuss what ever the author wants to reveal and discuss and if it's garbled and doesn't make any sense, then I want it changed, because I want our story told. I want the reader whoever reads this particular book or magazine article to know our story and to understand it. Bare facts don't teach you much. The date of the gold discovery and James Marshall's middle name and how many years elapsed between the beginning and the end of the gold rush. Things like that, they don't tell you anything. Its stories and its facts woven together and it's an understanding of the whole tapestry of history that makes it come alive and become part of our heritage.

F. W. Can you think of any others besides Dillinger's book here that stand out in you mind as a quality publication? I'm sure there's been several along the line and you're not keeping score, but I was curious if there's anything that sticks in your mind, any particular...

A. B. Well, the one that sticks in my mind, you may dismiss this, or whoever reads the transcript of this, may dismiss it because I have an obvious bias. But

there was a book that came out about 20 years ago, published by Ward Ritchie Press, called *We Were 49ers*. And the reason I'm biased is because my father translated that book. Edwin A. Beilharz was a professor of history at Santa Clara University. And *We were 49ers* is diaries of some Chilean miners who were here in 1849 and 1850 and the first half of that book in particular by a man named Vicente Perez Rosales is just absolutely superb. It is incomparably better than any other diary I've ever seen of the gold rush. Describing San Francisco, San Francisco Bay, the trip up the Sacramento River, Sutter's Fort, the Coloma Road, Sutter's Mill, the Coloma area, gold mining here, the river, the town, the Indians, absolutely sparkling descriptions, vivid portrayals. It all comes alive when you read those words. You can see this place in March of 1849, or February, when he was here. I've always encouraged people to read that book and everyone who has done it has come back to me and said, "Thank you for telling me about that book. That's the best thing on the gold rush I've ever seen before."

F. W. What was the name of that again?

A. B. *We Were 49ers*. It's been long out of print, we have two or three copies here in this library. And it still comes up in used book sales, used bookstores have it, county library has it, most libraries have it.

F. W. That's high praise. That's high praise.

A. B. Yeah, it's really good.

F. W. A lot of them are generalists and varying degrees of generalists at that, but to have somebody that has really documented it that well, that's interesting.

A. B. Well, he was a skillful writer. I found out later that Vicente Perez Rosales after he left California went back to Chile and became a diplomat and a senator and uh, I don't think they have president down there, but he was prime minister or something. He was very high in their government. And his house is now a national park in Chile. So, this was a man who had skill to begin with. He was a very intelligent man, cultured, educated, wise, but at the same time full of humor. That's the other part of that book, is Perez Rosales is just hysterical, he is so funny, every page is just makes you smile or laugh out loud. So, he was a good writer. My Dad had nothing to do with it, other than being a good translator. It was Perez Rosales and the other writers of that book who wrote so well.

F. W. Do you know how he spells his name?

A. B. Vicente, V-I-C-E-N-T-E, Perez, P-E-R-E-Z, Rosales, R-O-S-A-L-E-S.

F. W. That's worth reading.

A. B. Some of the other books on the gold rush, I tend to give rather blunt opinions on. Dr. Holliday, as good as his books are, I find him biased and narrow sometimes. I think his vision is not as encompassing and as wise as I wish it were. Although he does improve. He is improving with age. When he was a younger man, I think, he was more opinionated and stubborn than he is now. Rodman Paul who wrote a number of works in the early days, his works tend to be dry and academic. They're good research material, but they aren't good reading. I could go on, but...

F. W. Interesting, very interesting. One thing that I had read in the paper about the time of the Sesquicentennial was from Secretary of State of California, Bill

Jones, and he made comment in this article that he would like to see Coloma as a Williamsburg of the West. Where the town is apparently bypassed, not rebuilt, *per se* apparently, but to make it somewhat the way it was in the gold rush as Williamsburg is toward the Colonial times. Do you think that's realistic in the foreseeable future, or at all.

A. B. No. I mean, I think Bill Jones was just making a statement for its political worth there. I've never had the privilege of visiting Williamsburg, but I know about it. I've seen places like it. I've seen living history portrayals at any number of places. And the only time it really works is when you don't have any distractions. I mean the human imagination is immensely powerful and I believe in it, but it can be easily distracted. And here, even if you took the highway away, you'd still have local residents, you'd still have the houses that can be seen right across the river: the modern houses with their TV antennas, cars going by. You'd have to allow traffic to go across the bridge and people to get home. You couldn't shut out the outside world. In order to make living history really work, like it does in Williamsburg, you have to physically, visually, aurally and every other way, shut out the outside world to create a coherent and believable illusion of going back in time. So, that's why I say it's not possible here.

F. W. A lot of our visitors that come in are impressed because the town is the way it is. On the other hand, some people want to know where are the rides, which is really a stretch. But, you can't please everyone, but I had never heard that idea brought up before until I read this article by Bill Jones. I didn't know where it came from, if he was talking off the top of his head...

A. B. I never heard that either, but I think he was talking off the top of his head. When I've gone to living history places, they always meet you at the gate with the person who has the title of *greeter*. And the greeter tells you to your face that you're going back in time. And the greeter will tell you, "OK, when you go passed me and you go through that gate over there, see that gate, now that over there is 1776" or whatever the date is. They have to tell you that. And then you go in and you're able to, because your imagination is powerful and competent, you're able to go back in time, place yourself in that time as well. But, to just not tell people that, and have a town operating here as if it was 1848, you'd have people asking for rides, you'd have people asking what's the quickest way to get back to Sacramento, is there an airport around here, is there a gas station around here. It wouldn't work.

F. W. Part of the advantage, I think we have here is it is so rural coming into the park and if you were to all of a sudden have something that was manufactured after coming country, literal country, it would be a distortion. It would detract rather than add to the experience. Obviously, other people would have different ideas on it, but I hear what you're saying.

A. B. I wish it could work, I think it'd be marvelous. I just think realistically the answer to your question is no, it'll never happen.

F. W. What's the most fulfilling part of your career that you've been in the park, Alan?

A. B. Oh, it's uh, it's seeing that light come on in people eyes, on peoples faces. Sometimes it's children, but just as often it's adults who come here with a jaded

sense of well-being and carrying their troubles and their worries and their grievances with them and they come here and listen to one of my interpretive programs, for example, and find out that there's something way bigger than them. That they're not just stuck in a hole somewhere. They're part of a big thing that went on – a big thing called history and the human society; and how cultures interact; and how people work together; and how one event leads to another event; and how one small movement can create a world-wide phenomenon; and to understand that you're part of that makes you feel alive; and that's the light that I see come on when I'm able to successfully interpret the importance of the gold rush to the park visitors – to see their faces light up and to know that they've understood what it is I want them to understand and how important it is and that they're not alone and that they are not just stuck in a hole somewhere. They're not as lowly as they think they are. They are a part of the human race after all. That's the big reward to me. Then I know I've earned my money that day.

F. W. Well you've earned it a lot of days with a lot of people over the time that you've been here and just because of your dedication to the park. I think that's marvelous. Anything that you can think of Alan, that you'd like add on to this? My questions that I had have pretty well been answered, and I'd kind of just open it up to you if you can think of anything that you'd like to comment on.

A. B. Well, gee, I could tell stories until the weekend, but then you'd have a lot of transcribing to do.

F. W. I've got three more tapes.

A. B. No, I won't do that, I guess well I don't know if this is going to be helpful or not, I haven't thought it through first, but what does come to mind in thinking over some of these things is, the societal change that I've seen during my tenure here since 1978. We've all seen it, you see it remarked upon in the press and the media every day, how much society has changed during that period. I've seen here in the park though and it has impacted our operation quite a bit. One simple example is that when I first came one of the most popular use areas in the park was the monument picnic area. There were always people up there, there were private picnickers, there were family picnics, there were company picnics, there were group picnics, people would meet up there and have a picnic under the trees. Now, it's essentially zero, I almost never see anybody using that area. And that's an example of the phenomenon that I'm talking about – maybe not a good example, but it's the one that came to mind. Society changes, society's outlook, society's values, society's priorities have changed and I just think that observation may be useful to somebody someday in studying this period of Marshall Gold Discovery Park. That, uh, what am I trying to say here? The visitor's attitudes changed and along with it, the State Park System, which is an agency of State Government, a government of the people, has changed in response. And so, the park's priorities have changed, too. And the State Parks tend to react to what the public demands. In some ways, it's been very good and in some ways it hasn't. I think in a lot of cases our operations suffered because of it. We tend to cater now to interest groups. We tend to cater to people who make a lot of noise or have a lot of money or know how to pull political strings. Where

my belief is we should be preaching to the common man, we should be preaching to the young family who doesn't have any money and drives up here from Sacramento and wants to know about their heritage. I guess this is really too general to be of any use and I can't think of a way to make it more specific or to tell you exactly what I'm trying to say here.

F. W. Well, I know one segment we have that, I feel we have a great impact on, is the school children because we have over 40,000 a year that come through in school groups. It's interesting, and this is 4th graders for the most part, I believe. And the teachers, the background that has been prepared for the teachers, rather than bringing them up here for a day off, the study guides that the park people have put together here to help them plan the trip, experience it, and then follow up. I think that's just a tremendous advantage and that's come about just in recent years, maybe longer than I'm aware of. I can see the fulfillment that comes through just on those specific groups.

A. B. Well, yeah, we had a teacher's guide here when I first came, but it was only two pages long. And then Matt Sugarman had me prepare another one, which we've been using for quite a few years. And then, just yesterday, funny you should ask, just yesterday, I turned in a draft of a third teachers' guide and it's, oh I don't know, it's 40 pages long and still growing. Yeah, I think that is a good service that we provide. I guess part of what I was saying before, maybe this is an example of it, is that the teachers that we get here, no excuse me, a lot of the school groups that we get here are not really field trips the way you and I think of field trips. The way field trips were run 20 years ago. Where the local school

teacher will make arrangements to bring her or his class out to Coloma, teach the students about the heritage and the history and take them through the park, place by place and instill in them a respect and an understanding. What we often get instead is these whirlwind tours and they're not even really school field trips. They're commercial field trips where the commercial companies will contract with schools and bring them on a tour of the gold country. But some of them see Sutter's Fort, the State Capitol and Coloma all in one day. Now what kind of a field trip is that? And this is what society wants, now and it may be an example of what I was trying to say before, that society's changed. I think 20 – 25 years ago people wouldn't have tolerated that. They would have thought that was ridiculous. But now, believe it or not, some of these companies are successfully competing with their rivals by giving you four parks in one day instead of only three. They tell the teachers, " Well, well, look, we can take your students on four parks on one day. That other company over there, they're only going to give you three." And of course, they get the business, because they're going to give you four parks. But obviously, you and I know they're not going to learn a darned thing coming here in 45 minutes and getting right back on the bus and driving back down to Sacramento again.

F. W. On the other side of the page, I met a couple here that came through a few months ago, they had come through last winter on one of those rainy, rainy days and they couldn't walk around, the best they could do was drive up to the signs and read them. They were from Canada. They spent about a half a day. Came

back this fall spent the whole day, walking around at their leisure; that's the way to do it.

A. B. I love those people.

F. W. Don't we though.

A. B. I'll tell you, that's good. I've noticed that, too. And another example of that I've noticed is Christmas week which is coming up soon. I always looked forward to Christmas week and the reason is because people are not in a hurry. They've done their Christmas shopping, they gave their gifts, they've got their gifts, now they're coasting until January 3 when they have to go back to work. They're not under pressure; they're not trying to see the whole of Highway 49 in two days, or one day because it's all they've got. And they come up to the counter and they put their elbow down, and they put their head in their hand, and they ask you something like "What was James Marshall like? Tell me about that." Oh man, I just live for those moments. Because the rest of the year they're in such a hurry, they can't stop for a minute and think about this. They can't take the time to walk up to Marshall's monument. They can't even take the time to walk down to the riverbank and listen to the echo of the gold rush. They're in a hurry and they got to get back to work and they're looking at their watch and they're thinking about where they're going to stay tonight or whether they're going to miss work or their children are not going to get their homework done or something. They're so full of worry, that they don't have time to soak in this wonderful history that we have for them.

F. W. The fall is, I think probably the best time of year. Everything is quiet, it's not crowded and people seem to have a tranquil mood about them and they really enjoy it. Not that they don't enjoy it the rest of the year. Maybe it's because I enjoy it so much and I just feel...

A. B. Well, you're right the fall is like that too, but it's mostly, I think, it's because the clientele tends to be senior citizens in the fall. And they're not in a hurry because they don't work. They have plenty of leisure time. But, nothing against seniors, but I wish sometimes that the younger people could take that same kind of time, that's what I'm saying.

F. W. Well, you know, what's interesting, as I've seen maybe half a dozen children come through, I have not aware of it at the time, but they were so interested in it they brought their parents back up, so they could spend more time, taking pictures inside and going around with their parents. That's the exception rather than the rule. But time depends on the parents interests and the parents time, but the fact that some of these 4th graders will go out of their way to get their mother and father to come up on a weekend and show them what they saw with their class.

A. B. That's remarkable, that's great.

F. W. That's fulfilling.

A. B. I know I've sometimes seen the opposite too, where activist parents who really care about their children's education will go out of their way to prepare their own children for a trip to Coloma. One family, I remember, came here a few years ago, came from Berkeley, or one of those towns in the East Bay. And Dad

drove and mother read for the entire 3 –3-½ hour trip, in the car, from a book about the gold rush non-stop until they got here. It was only three hours, but it was better than nothing, which is what usually they get. By the time they got here, they were hopped up, and they were full of questions, and their eyes were sparkling, it was really cool. I really liked it.

F. W. Thank you, Alan.

A. B. It was a pleasure.

F. W. I enjoyed listening to your comments and I appreciate your time. Thank you again.

A. B. All right, you're welcome.

(Transcribed by Melody Moore)

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Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park
and the
Gold Discovery Park Association
Oral History Project
Interview Agreement

We, Alan Beilharz (Narrator) and Frank Weingart (Interviewer)
do hereby give to the Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park for research and eductional use the tape-recorded interview(s) recorded on audio/video, transcripts(s), and related photographs(s) as an unrestricted gift and transfer to the Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park legal title and all literary property rights including copyright. This gift does not preclude any use which we may want to make of the information in the recordings ourselves.

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Mr. Alan Beilharz
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Dear Alan,

On behalf of myself, the Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park, future researchers and historians, thank you for the time and information you gave to our Oral History Project. Your interview will become a part of the permanent archives of the historic research library in the museum at the park.

Your oral history is a valued contribution to California's historical records. In addition to providing a source of historical information to reseachers, the oral history records will aid us in the interpretation of the park to visitors from around the world.

Sincerely,

Frank E. Weingart

Frank E. Weingart